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(54) **SHAPED FUEL SOURCE AND FUEL CELL**

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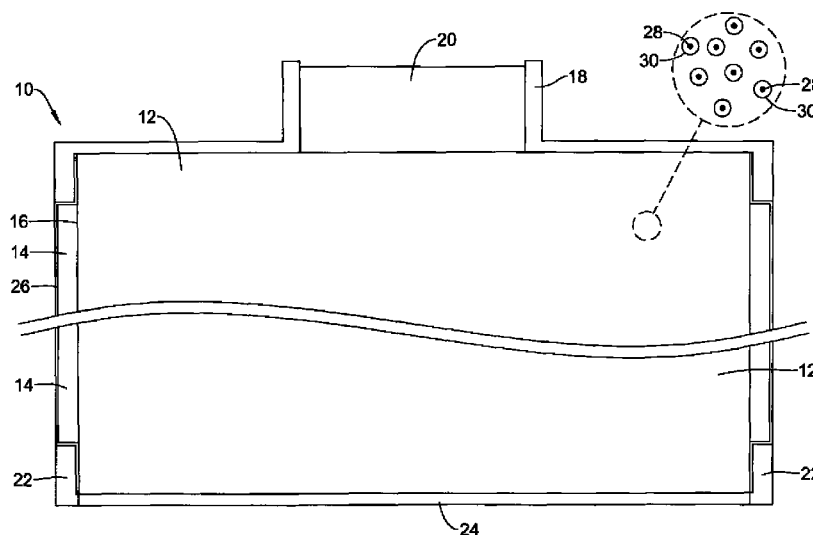
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ABSTRACT

An example fuel cell assembly may include a shaped fuel source that is formed into a desired shape. The shaped fuel source may have an outer surface, and a fuel cell may be mounted directly on the outer surface of the shaped fuel source. In some instances, the fuel cell assembly may also include one or more of a cathode cap, an anode cap, a refill port, and an outer shell disposed around an exterior of the fuel cell assembly, but these are not required.

18 Claims, 1 Drawing Sheet



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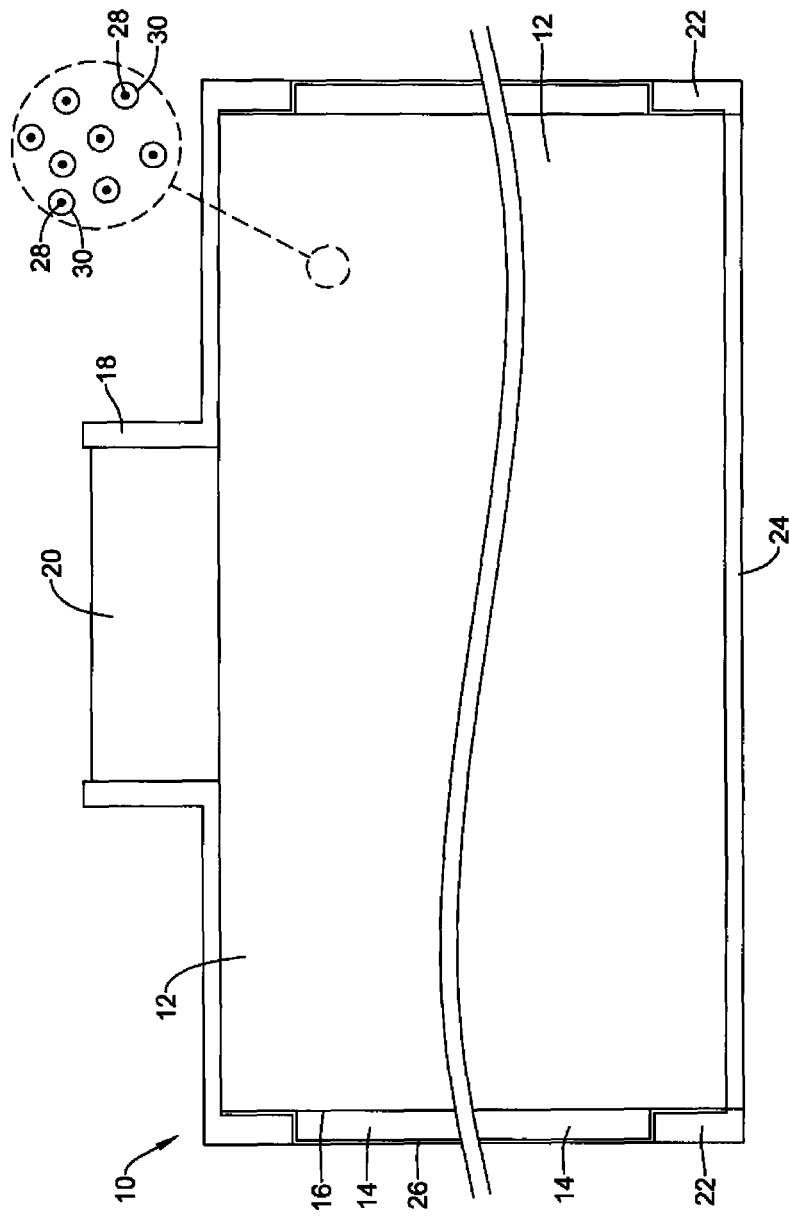
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SHAPED FUEL SOURCE AND FUEL CELL

PRIORITY

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/335,352 entitled "Metal Hydride Fuel Cell Power Generator", the entire disclosure of which is herein incorporated by reference.

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is related to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/705,383, filed on even day herewith and entitled "FUEL CELL", the entire disclosure of which is herein incorporated by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present disclosure relates generally to fuel cells, and more particularly, to fuel cells and/or components thereof, as well as methods of making fuel cells.

BACKGROUND

A wide variety of fuel cells have been developed. Of the known fuel cells, each has certain advantages and disadvantages. There is an ongoing need to provide alternative fuel cells.

SUMMARY

The disclosure relates generally to fuel cells, and more particularly, to fuel cells and/or components thereof, as well as methods of making fuel cells. An example fuel cell assembly includes a shaped fuel source that is formed into a desired shape. In some instances, the shaped fuel source may include a plurality of fuel source particles having a coating disposed thereon, but this is not required in all embodiments. The shaped fuel source may have an outer surface, with a fuel cell mounted directly on the outer surface of the shaped fuel source. In some instances, the fuel cell assembly may also include one or more of a cathode cap, an anode cap, a refill port, and an outer shell disposed around an exterior of the fuel cell assembly, but these are not required.

An example method for manufacturing a fuel cell assembly may include providing a fuel source, wherein the fuel source sometimes includes a plurality of fuel source particles having a corrosion-resistance coating. The fuel source may be formed into a desired shape that has an outer surface. A fuel cell may then be coupled to the outer surface of the fuel source, without an intervening container (and/or other thermal barrier) between the outer surface of the fuel source and the fuel cell.

The above summary is not intended to describe each disclosed embodiment or every implementation of the present disclosure. The Figures and Description which follow more particularly exemplify various illustrative embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention may be more completely understood in consideration of the following description of various illustrative embodiments in connection with the accompanying drawing, in which:

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FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional side view of an example fuel cell assembly.

While this disclosure is amenable to various modifications and alternative forms, specifics thereof have been shown by way of example in the drawing and will be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the intention is not to limit the disclosure to the particular embodiments described. On the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention.

DESCRIPTION

The following description should be read with reference to the drawing. The drawing, which is not necessarily to scale, depicts an illustrative embodiment and is not intended to limit the scope of the invention.

For the following defined terms, these definitions shall be applied, unless a different definition is given in the claims or elsewhere in this specification.

All numeric values are herein assumed to be modified by the term "about," whether or not explicitly indicated. The term "about" generally refers to a range of numbers that one of skill in the art would consider equivalent to the recited value (i.e., having the same function or result). In many instances, the terms "about" may include numbers that are rounded to the nearest significant figure.

The recitation of numerical ranges by endpoints includes all numbers within that range (e.g. 1 to 5 includes 1, 1.5, 2, 2.75, 3, 3.80, 4, and 5).

As used in this specification and the appended claims, the singular forms "a", "an", and "the" include plural referents unless the content clearly dictates otherwise. As used in this specification and the appended claims, the term "or" is generally employed in its sense including "and/or" unless the content clearly dictates otherwise.

FIG. 1 schematically illustrates an example fuel cell assembly 10. In the example shown, fuel cell assembly 10 includes a shaped fuel source 12. A flexible fuel cell 14 is shown disposed on, mounted to, wrapped around, or otherwise coupled directly to an outer surface 16 of shaped fuel source 12. In some instances, fuel cell assembly 10 may include a cathode cap 18. A refill port (and/or refill plug or valve) 20 may be disposed in or part of cathode cap 18. Fuel cell assembly 10 may also include an anode ring 22 and/or an anode cap 24. In some instances, fuel cell assembly may be housed within a shell or can 26 as shown.

In some cases, the fuel cell 14 directly engages the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12. In some instances, the fuel cell 14 may be wrapped around the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12 and secured so that there is direct mechanical pressure forcing the fuel cell 14 into engagement with the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12. In some cases, the shell or can 26 may be used to force the fuel cell 14 into direct engagement with the outer surface 16 of the fuel source. In some cases, the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12 may include an adhesive coating or the like, and the fuel cell may be directly secured to the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12 via the adhesive coating. These are just some illustrative embodiments.

shaped fuel source 12 may be formed from any number of different materials. For example, shaped fuel source 12 may include a metal hydride. Such materials may be desirable, for example, because it may be possible to recharge these materials with hydrogen. Example metal hydrides may include LaNi_5H_5 , FeTiH_2 , Mg_2NiH_4 , and TiV_2H_4 . Example reversible chemical hydrides, which may also be used, include but

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are not limited to NaAlH_4 , LiAlH_4 , $\text{Mg}(\text{AlH}_4)_2$, $\text{Ti}(\text{AlH}_4)_4$, $\text{Fe}(\text{BH}_4)_4$, NaBH_4 , and $\text{Ca}(\text{BH}_4)_2$. Other materials are also contemplated for the shaped fuel source 12. It is contemplated such a shaped fuel source 12 may be compressed, molded, cast, or otherwise formed into a desired shape, as desired.

In at least some embodiments, shaped fuel source 12 may be particulate in nature and, thus, may include a plurality of particles 28. These particles 28 may be compressed, molded, cast, or otherwise formed into a desired shape, as desired. The desired shape may depend on the desired application. In the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 1, the shaped fuel source 12 is shaped into a cylindrical shape. However, other shapes are contemplated including rectangular shaped, prism shaped, or any other suitable shape or shape combination as desired. In some instances, the shaped fuel source 12 may be shaped to resemble the shapes of commonly used alkaline and/or lithium ion batteries such as AAA, AA, C, or D batteries, but this is not required.

In some instances, a coating 30 may be disposed on the shaped fuel source 12, and when provided, on particles 28. Coating 30 may be an anti-corrosion coating and/or a coating that may help preserve the structural integrity of a shaped fuel source 12, and/or prevent breakdown of the fuel source (e.g., particles 28). In at least some embodiments, coating 30 may include copper. An example process for coating particles 28 is described below in Example 1. In at least some embodiments, particles 28 of the shaped fuel source 12 are formed into the desired shape after the coating process, but this is not required.

Fuel cell 14 may be coupled directly to the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12. More particularly, and in some cases, shaped fuel source 12 (in some cases particles 28 coated with coating 30) may be formed into the desired shape, and the fuel cell 14 may be disposed on the outer surface of the shaped fuel source 12. This may include disposing fuel cell 14 directly onto the outer surface 16 of the shaped fuel source 12. Such a fuel cell assembly 10 may be described as being free from a thermal interface structure, container, or any other structure between shaped fuel source 12 and fuel cell 14. This may be desirable for a number of reasons. For example, because less structure is used, the overall material cost of fuel cell assembly 10 may be reduced. In addition, because a thermal interface structure, container, or any other structure may be left out, a larger fuel source 12 may be utilized for a given fuel cell assembly 10. Thus, fuel cell assembly 10 may have a greater amount of fuel on board and available for providing power. Other desirable features may be associated with mounting fuel cell 14 directly on the outer surface of the shaped fuel source 12 including a lower mass transfer and a lower thermal resistance path between the shaped fuel source 12 and the fuel cell 14.

It is contemplated that fuel cell 14 may include any number of different structures. For example, fuel cell 14 may include a pair of electrodes (e.g., a cathode and an anode) with one or more layers disposed therebetween. Such layers may include one or more gas diffusion layers (e.g., conductive material, porous electrically conductive material, carbon fabric, or the like), a proton exchange membrane (PEM) (or membrane electrode assembly (MEA), which may include a carbon and/or platinum coated conductive material or the like. These various layers may be stacked into a planar structure, with the anode electrode on top and the cathode electrode on the bottom. In FIG. 1, the anode electrode of the fuel cell 14 may be situated adjacent the shaped fuel source 12, and the cathode electrode may be adjacent the shell or can 26, but this is just an example. In some embodiments, fuel cell 14 may be a fuel cell stack similar to those described in U.S. patent appli-

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cation Ser. No. 12/705,383, filed on even day herewith and entitled "FUEL CELL", the entire disclosure of which is herein incorporated by reference. It is contemplated that other arrangements and structures may be utilized for fuel cell 14, as desired.

As alluded to above, fuel cell assembly 10 may include one or more additional structures. For example, this may include a cathode cap 18, a refill port (and/or refill plug or valve) 20, an anode ring 22 and/or anode cap 24, and/or a shell or can 26. Cathode cap 18 may be formed as a structure that may help fuel cell assembly 10 connect to an appropriate cathode terminal (e.g., "+" terminal). Likewise, anode ring 22 and/or anode cap 24 may help fuel cell assembly 10 connect to an appropriate anode terminal (e.g., "-" terminal). Refill port 20 may serve as a port through which hydrogen may be infused into the shaped fuel source 12 to recharge the shaped fuel source 12. The shell or can 26 may surround the exterior of fuel cell assembly 10 and help provide structural integrity as well as help insulate and/or seal fuel cell assembly 10. In some instances, the shell or can 26 may be threaded on both the top and bottom ends so as to be threadably engaged with a cathode cap 18 and an anode cap 24, but this is not required.

EXAMPLES

The following examples serve to exemplify some illustrative embodiments, and are not meant to be limiting in any way.

Example 1

An example process for coating metal hydride particles such as particles 28 of FIG. 1 includes:

In a first container dissolving 3.5 g CuSO_4 in 50 ml water. 0.5 g ethylenediamine tetraacetic acid (EDTA) are then added to the first container. The CuSO_4 solution/EDTA is then heated at 50° C. while agitating for 30 minutes to form the coating solution.

In a second container 27.9 g $\text{LaNi}_{4.25}\text{Al}_{0.75}$ powders are wetted with 0.63 g (about 0.79 cc) ethanol. A total of 1.3 g (about 1.59 cc) formaldehyde is added dropwise to the second container and the mixture is agitated to make it uniform.

In a combined container, the wetted $\text{LaNi}_{4.25}\text{Al}_{0.75}$ and the coating solution is combined and the combination is agitated intensively for 10 minutes. The $\text{LaNi}_{4.25}\text{Al}_{0.75}$ powders are filtered out and rinsed five times with deionized water. The powders are then dried naturally in air. The powders are now coated, and are compressed into a desired shape (e.g., with a top compressive pressure of about 20 MPa).

It should be understood that this disclosure, in many respects, is only illustrative. Changes may be made in details, particularly in matters of shape, size, and arrangement of steps without exceeding the scope of the invention. The invention's scope is, of course, defined in the language in which the appended claims are expressed.

What is claimed is:

1. A fuel cell assembly, comprising:

a shaped fuel source formed into a desired shape, the shaped fuel source having an outer surface; and
a flexible fuel cell including an anode electrode, the anode electrode wrapped around and directly engaging the outer surface of the shaped fuel source, wherein the flexible fuel cell and anode electrode conform to the shape of the shaped fuel source.

2. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, wherein the shaped fuel source is particulate in nature and includes a plurality of fuel source particles having a coating disposed thereon.

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3. The fuel cell assembly of claim 2, wherein shaped fuel source includes a metal hydride.

4. The fuel cell assembly of claim 2, wherein the coating includes a corrosion-resistance coating.

5. The fuel cell assembly of claim 4, wherein the coating includes copper.

6. The fuel cell assembly of claim 2, wherein the coating preserves the structural integrity of the shaped fuel source.

7. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, wherein the fuel cell assembly is free of a thermal interface structure between the shaped fuel source and the flexible fuel cell.

8. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, wherein the fuel cell assembly is free of a container between the shaped fuel source and the flexible fuel cell.

9. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, further comprising a refill port.

10. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, further comprising one or more of a cathode cap, an anode cap, and an outer shell.

11. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, wherein the flexible fuel cell is secured to the outer surface of the shaped fuel source so that there is mechanical pressure forcing the flexible fuel cell into engagement with the outer surface of the shaped fuel source.

12. The fuel cell assembly of claim 1, wherein the flexible fuel cell is secured to the outer surface of the shaped fuel source using an adhesive.

13. The fuel cell assembly of claim 10, wherein the flexible fuel cell includes a cathode electrode, wherein the cathode electrode is in contact with the outer shell.

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14. A fuel cell assembly, comprising:

a particulate fuel source including a plurality of metal hydride particles;

wherein the metal hydride particles includes a copper coating;

a flexible fuel cell including an anode electrode, the anode electrode wrapped around, secured to, and directly engaging an outer surface of the fuel source, wherein the flexible fuel cell and anode electrode conform to the shape of the shaped fuel source;

a cathode cap;

an anode cap;

a refill port; and

an outer shell disposed around an exterior of the fuel cell assembly.

15. The fuel cell assembly of claim 14, wherein the fuel cell assembly is free of a thermal interface structure between the fuel source and the flexible fuel cell.

16. The fuel cell assembly of claim 14, wherein the flexible fuel cell is secured to the outer surface of the fuel source by the outer shell exerting a mechanical pressure forcing the flexible fuel cell into engagement with the outer surface of the fuel source.

17. The fuel cell assembly of claim 14, wherein the flexible fuel cell is secured to the outer surface of the shaped fuel source using an adhesive.

18. The fuel cell assembly of claim 14, wherein the flexible fuel cell includes a cathode electrode, wherein the cathode electrode is in contact with the outer shell.

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